



Senate Press Office

201 Paul D. Coverdell Legislative Office Building
18 Capitol Square
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
404.656.0028 or outside the Atlanta area 800.282.5803

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
March 19, 2007

PRESS RELEASE

For Information Contact:
Merri M. Brantley, Director
merri.brantley@senate.ga.gov
404.463.6833 (O) /770.361.4364 (C)

***Deaf Child's Bill of Rights Act* passes Senate**



Sen. Preston Smith (right) testifies before the Senate Education Committee with Kimberly McGuiness of Cave Spring at his side. Mrs. McGuiness lobbied Sen. Smith to introduce the legislation.

ATLANTA – The *Deaf Child's Bill of Rights Act* passed the Senate State today, 46 to 0. Sponsored by Sen. Preston Smith (R-Rome) and Sen. Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain), the measure will require local school systems to take into account the specific communications needs of hearing impaired students and to guarantee that deaf students are instructed in whatever communication mode or language is deemed necessary – such as sign language, oral, aural or with visual signs or clues.

Senate Bill 168 is the first part of a duo of bills Sen. Smith and Sen. Butler have introduced to benefit children in the Georgia School for the Deaf in Cave Spring, which is located in Sen. Smith's district,

and the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf located in Clarkston, as well as children currently enrolled in Georgia's public school systems across Georgia.

The bill stipulates that no deaf or hard-of-hearing students will be denied the opportunity for instruction in a particular mode or language solely because the child has some remaining hearing, the child's parent or guardian is not fluent in the communication mode or language being taught, or the child has previous experience with some other communication mode or language.

Sen. Smith recognized Kimberly McGuinness of Cave Spring from the floor of the Senate this morning. Mrs. McGuinness is the mother of a deaf child, Julia, and brought the idea for the legislation to Sen. Smith. Julia is a student at Georgia School for the Deaf.

"I am pleased we were able to get this legislation passed today," Sen. Smith said. "Hearing impaired people have given a great deal to our society, and we need to give back to them. This legislation is a good start."

During his presentation of the bills, Sen. Smith referenced a boyhood friend who was deaf and talked about others who contributed to assisting the deaf over the years including Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, whose mother and wife both were deaf. During his lifetime, Bell hoped to eradicate hereditary deafness.

The companion legislation, Senate Bill 170, which also passed the Senate today, 47-0, will allow students to fulfill the foreign language requirement for a college preparatory diploma with American Sign Language – the preferred language used by the deaf community in the United States.

In recent years, a number of states have passed legislation recognizing American Sign Language (ASL) as a foreign language and permitting high schools and universities to accept it in fulfillment of foreign language requirements for hearing as well as deaf students. Many community colleges and universities including Brown, Georgetown, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Purdue, and the University of Washington, accept ASL as a foreign language for academic or elective credit.

In Georgia, American Sign Language has been accepted as a foreign language in limited circumstances: for deaf students as one unit elective credit and for other students as the third unit of foreign language credit. American Sign Language is taught in several colleges both for credit and non-credit.

#####

Sen. Preston Smith serves as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. He represents the 52nd Senate District which includes Floyd County and portions of Bartow and Gordon counties. He may be reached by phone at 404.656.0034 or by e-mail at preston.smith@senate.ga.gov.

Sen. Gloria Butler serves as Deputy Minority Whip. She represents the 55th Senate District which includes portions of DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. She may be reached by phone at 404.656.0075 or by e-mail at gloria.butler@senate.ga.gov.